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To cite this article: Lotte Jensen (2016) 'See our Succumbing Fatherland, Overwhelmed by Disaster, Woe and Strife': Coping with Crisis during the Reign of Louis Bonaparte, Dutch Crossing, 40:2, 151-164, DOI: [10.1080/03096564.2016.1159867](https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1159867)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1159867>



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Published online: 20 May 2016.



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‘See our Succumbing Fatherland, Overwhelmed by Disaster, Woe and Strife’: Coping with Crisis during the Reign of Louis Bonaparte

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During the reign of Louis Bonaparte (1806–10) the Kingdom of Holland suffered three major catastrophes: the explosion in the city of Leiden (1807) and floods in the provinces of Zeeland (1808) and Gelderland (1809). This paper will illustrate the close relationship between crisis, collective identity and politics during these years and show how these crises were used as political tools by rivaling parties. On the one hand, the king took the opportunity to present himself as a caring and loving father of the Dutch people by offering them emotional and financial support. On the other hand, writers used these occurrences to express their feelings of fear and discomfort concerning the foreign regime: in their opinion the series of disasters was directly related to the loss of sovereignty and the general decline of the fatherland.

KEYWORDS Historical disaster studies, flood, Louis Bonaparte, Napoleonic wars, nationalism, occasional poetry

Introduction

See our succumbing Fatherland,
overwhelmed by disaster, woe and strife
But see also at the bubbling waves
The nation’s protector at your right hand side.¹

On 2 March 1809 Frans Adam de Hartogh recited a poem on a flood that had struck large parts of the Kingdom of Holland earlier that year. His audience consisted of his fellow members of the literary society 'Kunstliefde spaart geen vlijt' in The Hague.² They heard an extensive and very emotional description of the havoc caused by the floating ice and the terrifying last moments of victims who were swallowed by the high water. De Hartogh was referring not only to the misery caused by this natural disaster but also to the devastating effect of the Napoleonic wars in general. His greatest fear was the total collapse of his fatherland that was once admired by all people on earth. He concluded his verse by expressing his hope for a better future: 'Maintain! maintain! our fatherland'.³

De Hartogh wrote his poem under pressing political circumstances: in 1806 the Dutch Republic had been transformed into a kingdom when Napoleon Bonaparte appointed one of his brothers, Louis Bonaparte, to the throne. Since Napoleon had crowned himself as the new emperor of France in 1804, it rapidly became clear how far reaching his ambitions were: in short time, he appointed several family members to different thrones in Europe, thus increasing his power over the continent. Louis Bonaparte was given an important, strategic position, as the Dutch territory bordered the sea that posed a natural barrier between the arch-enemies France and Great Britain. Four years later, in 1810, Napoleon forced his brother to abdicate and annexed the Dutch Kingdom to his empire.⁴ This annexation lasted until 1813 when parts of the Netherlands were liberated by Prussian and Russian troops.

During the reign of Louis Bonaparte the Kingdom of Holland was hit by three major catastrophes: a huge explosion in the city of Leiden in 1807 (the 'buskruitramp' or gunpowder disaster), a flood in the province of Zeeland in 1808 and a flood in the province of Gelderland in 1809. This article discusses the role of the media in the 'framing' of these disasters and pays particular attention to the political dimensions involved. While emphasis will be on popular reaction to the floods in Zeeland and Gelderland, as the catastrophe of Leiden has already been investigated thoroughly,⁵ it is necessary to include the Leiden explosion as well because it set the tone for the two other calamities.

This case study will elucidate the close relationship between crisis, collective identity and politics during these years and show how these crises were used as political tools by rivalling parties. On the one hand, the king took the opportunity to present himself as a caring and loving father of the Dutch people by offering them emotional and financial support. His actions were met with gratitude by the people, who pinned their hopes for a better future on him. On the other hand, pamphleteers expressed their feelings of fear and discomfort concerning the foreign regime: in their opinion the series of catastrophes was directly related to the current political situation and the general decline of the fatherland. These catastrophes therefore also gave rise to critical voices that argued for the maintenance of an independent Dutch nation.

Crisis, politics and national identity

During the last two decades historical disaster studies has developed into a flourishing area of research. The historian Gerrit Jasper Schenk, who, amongst others, has drawn

attention to this burgeoning field, emphasizes that this topic calls for transdisciplinary and comparative cultural approaches.⁶ The fruitfulness of a multi-layered approach is also demonstrated in the conference volume, *Krisengeschichte(n). Krise als Leitbegriff und Erzählmuster in kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive* (2013), where the concept of ‘crisis’ is treated from psychological, historical, narrative and communication perspectives.⁷

This article contributes to the field of historical disaster studies by pointing at the political dimensions of the representation of disasters in the media.⁸ With regard to the representation of disasters, the present-day media landscape has changed dramatically in comparison to that of pre-modern times, leading to new global, technological and ethical approaches.⁹ Some of the basic insights, however, remain applicable to pre-modern times. Firstly, the way a culture remembers disasters is strongly influenced by the way they are represented and framed in the media. First impressions mediated directly after the event often have a huge impact on later perceptions.¹⁰ Secondly, a ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ account of the happenings is virtually impossible because a description always relies on narrative structures that inevitably entail some forms of interpretation.¹¹ In most cases, ‘objectivity’ is not strived for at all, and social, political or financial interests are involved in shaping the account. Thirdly, disasters do not only have an impact on individuals’ lives, but also on the levels of the city, region or the nation. Collective events play an important role in moulding group identities, and the populace of an area or kingdom often experiences greater feelings of solidarity when faced with disaster.¹²

With regard to this case study, the national level is of particular importance. The years of French rule (1806–13) produced a growing resistance against French hegemony. Novelists, poets, academics and pamphleteers started publishing subversive, patriotic accounts about the nation, its culture and its inhabitants, in order to deal with the existential crisis. French dominance led to a heightened national self-awareness and inspired Dutch authors to express strong feelings of patriotism. In their writings they cultivated the nation’s glorious past, thus contributing to a shared national self-image and a sense of togetherness.¹³ Similar developments can be witnessed in Germany and Spain, where authors like Heinrich von Kleist, Theodor Körner, Juan Battista Arriaza and Manuel José Quintana published explicitly patriotic texts in reaction to the Napoleonic wars.¹⁴

This raises the question: what impact did the three major disasters during the reign of Louis Bonaparte have on the rise of national thought? To what extent did they contribute to feelings of national solidarity, and how were these related to the rise of anti-French, nationalism amongst the Dutch population in general? To answer this question some further background information on Louis Bonaparte’s reign is needed.

The ambivalent image of Louis Napoleon

The reign of Louis Bonaparte had two different faces: that of the good king and that of the foreign, unpopular ruler. On the one hand, he had the image of being a truly national king (‘le roi national’), whose main goal was to protect and improve his kingdom. He stimulated intellectual and cultural life by investing large sums of money in old and new institutions. He, for instance, gave new impetus to institutions such as the Royal Library

in The Hague and the State Museum for Paintings in Amsterdam, and founded The Royal Academy of Sciences, Literature and the Arts in 1808. He also sponsored theatrical life and elevated the theatres in The Hague and Amsterdam to the status of royal theatres.¹⁵

His image probably benefited most from the way he acted during the first major disaster that struck his kingdom. In the afternoon of 12 January 1807, around a quarter after four, a ship with more than 17,000 tons of gunpowder exploded in the inner city of Leiden. Two thousand people were injured, and 151 died.¹⁶ Houses in the immediate area were completely destroyed, and large parts of the city became impassable terrain. The king visited the city the same night to get an impression of the scale of the disaster. He immediately offered financial help by providing the city of Leiden with an emergency loan of 100,000 guilders. Furthermore, a national collection was held, which was the first of its kind. An impressive total of nearly two million guilders was donated by the Dutch authorities and people.¹⁷ The king furthermore provided housing for some of the homeless people in his own palace in The Hague. He made sure that the Department of Internal Affairs coordinated all assistance and that everything was documented very precisely. One might well say that the king successfully led the entire operation and behaved like a true ‘crisis manager’.

All these actions were met with great gratitude by the people of Leiden, as can be seen in the many occasional writings that appeared during the first weeks after the disaster. Many poets praised Louis Bonaparte for his willingness to help out the victims and saw him as a real savior.¹⁸ His efforts to support the Dutch were also extensively reported in official reports and state-sponsored journals like *Le Vrai Hollandais* and *Courant royal*, thus ensuring positive, top-down media coverage.¹⁹ Illustrative is the following laudatory poem in *Le Vrai Hollandais*, in which the first letters of each line spell out the monarch’s name:

Le peuple consterné, dans ce désastre affreux,
Ouvre encore son cœur à la douce espérance.
Un mortel bienfaisant apparaît à ses yeux:
Il affronte la mort, qui sous ses pas s’avance!
Sur son front est gravé; père des malheureux.²⁰

This poem also contains the first mention of one of his other nicknames: ‘père des malheureux’ (father of the unfortunate).²¹ The king’s positive image was further propagated through engravings and prints that showed him amidst the suffering people of Leiden (Figure 1).

On the other hand, Louis Bonaparte was a puppet of his brother. He had to take various unpopular measures, such as the raising of high taxes and the maintaining of the Continental System that forbade the import of English goods to the European continent. Furthermore, Louis Bonaparte had to recruit soldiers for Napoleon’s army; on behalf of his brother he forced young orphan boys to join the army, which led to fierce protests.²² His image was also negatively influenced by the fact that he restricted press freedom: publishers, printers and authors had to send copies to the Directorate of Justice and Police, where all material was carefully examined.²³ It didn’t contribute to his popularity either, that he spent large sums of money on removal costs and the maintenance of his palaces in Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, while the majority of the people lived



FIGURE 1 King Louis Napoleon visiting Leiden after the disaster of 12 January 1807. Reiner Vinkeles/ Daniël Vrijdag, Amsterdam 1808. Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

in straitened circumstances.²⁴ Because of his dependency on his brother, one of his other nicknames was the paralyzed king (*lamme koning*). This portrayal stood in sharp contrast to the image of the loving father of the Dutch nation and people.

In keeping with the ambivalent image of Louis Bonaparte, the reactions to his performance at Leiden were not unanimously positive. An eyewitness, for instance, stated that he refused to see the 'paralysed king' because his love for the fatherland was too strong.²⁵ Another example of a less than adulatory response to the king's role can be found in the theatre play *Amelia Fabricius of Delft door buskruit verwoest* (1807), written by the publisher Adriaan Loosjes from Haarlem. Loosjes belonged to the faction of the Patriots and was one of the people who had circulated a protest against the arrival of Louis Bonaparte in the Dutch Republic in 1806.²⁶ In his play, he drew a parallel with the gunpowder explosion that had occurred in 1654 in the city of Delft and killed several hundred people. Strikingly, he made no reference to the king in this historical play at all. On the contrary, he chose Johan de Witt, the former grand pensionary of the United Provinces, as the role model. Given the fact, that the Republic had just been transformed into a monarchy, this choice can be interpreted as an act of resistance against the new sovereign.²⁷

When analysing the popular responses to the floods of 1808 and 1809, we should keep two things in mind. Firstly, the ambivalent image of the king (being good and bad at the same time) resonates in many of the texts. The representation of Louis Bonaparte was predominantly positive: in many cases he was even perceived as the final refuge in disastrous times. At the same time authors expressed feelings of fear, anger and resistance against the French regime. Between the lines, many of them warned their fellow countrymen against the hard-hearted usurper, Napoleon. Yet, their critique was mainly directed at the French emperor and not at his brother Louis (with a few exceptions). Secondly, it is noteworthy that the word ‘disaster’ can bear multiple meanings within one and the same text. This term regularly referred not only to the actual catastrophic event, but also to the disastrous times the fatherland was going through in general. A telling example is a pamphlet of October 1807, in which an anonymous author predicts that a series of disasters will hit the Kingdom of Holland. Based upon astronomical observations, he forecasts the arrival of armed forces, increased poverty, and higher taxes. He also foresees a total and dreadful ‘fall of the fatherland’.²⁸ In other words: the occurrence of a disaster was often directly linked to the current political situation.

The flood of 1808 in Zeeland

In the night of 14–15 January, the province of Zeeland was hit by a very heavy storm. The damages and losses were highest in the city of Vlissingen: water raged the streets, many houses collapsed, and 31 people lost their lives. Along the banks of the river Scheldt another 21 persons were killed, which brought the total number of victims to 52.²⁹ Large parts of the province, including Zuid-Beveland, had become a wilderness, and the salt water had rendered hundreds of acres infertile. Thousands of people had lost their houses and lacked fresh water and food. There was hardly anything left of the little town Kruiningen.³⁰ (Figure 2).

As was the case in Leiden, Louis Bonaparte offered immediate financial help by donating 50,000 guilders. This gesture was received with gratitude by the authorities, who thanked the ‘beloved monarch’ for his ‘fatherly care’.³¹ Assistance was also offered by people in the neighbourhood who sent food and necessities to the survivors. The local newspaper, *Middelburgsche Courant*, published detailed lists of the donations that were received. They, for example, reported that a society called ‘Vriendschap’ (Friendship) had sent 500 pounds of beef and that an unknown philanthropist donated sixty tuns of turf to those in need.³² Financial donations were also sent by people living in other provinces, such as South Holland, North Holland, and Utrecht.³³

In many respects the situation resembled the earlier one in Leiden: there was a widely felt need to help the victims of the disaster, and the king was the first to set the right example. However, there was one very important difference with the disaster of 1807: the political situation in Zeeland, particularly in Vlissingen, was even more precarious than that in Leiden. In November 1807 it was decided in the Treaty of Fontainebleau that the Kingdom of Holland was to be augmented with East Friesland, a former Prussian territory, and that the city of Vlissingen would become part of the French empire.³⁴ This was



FIGURE 2 Flood in the Palingstraat in Vlissingen, 1808. Izaak Jansz. De Wit / Johannes Peter Visser Bender (Haarlem 1808). Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

the first step towards a complete annexation of the Dutch kingdom by Napoleon and did not go unnoticed. One of the fiercest protests that appeared was entitled ‘Complaint of a mother from Vlissingen’ (*Klagt eener Vlissingsche Moeder*), written by an anonymous author.³⁵ In this clandestine pamphlet, a mother lamented the fact that Vlissingen had been torn away from the fatherland and that her sons would be forced to join the French army. Fleeing was no option, as this would mean falling into complete poverty elsewhere and leaving her old and sick father behind. Her voice was very emotional and militant: she was furious about these gruesome disasters (*ijsselijkste rampen*) and assured the usurpers that the mothers of Vlissingen would do everything to protect their sons from this fate. She pinned her last hopes on Louis Bonaparte, who himself was a father and had experienced the loss of a son. He was the only one that could still turn the tide, as the treaty had not yet been ratified, and the author begged him to be ‘a true father of the people’.³⁶ Her plea did not succeed: on 21 January 1808, the treaty was officially ratified.

This political background has to be taken into account when analysing the popular responses to the flood in Zeeland. On the one hand, Louis Bonaparte is praised for offering help in times of crisis; on the other hand, fierce criticism is uttered against the French annexation of Vlissingen. The poet Willem Justus Winckler lauds the king extensively for being the first to show his sympathy for the victims of the disaster and encouraging the rest of the nation to help:

Our prince, the best Father of the nation,
Was the first to express his sympathy,

And thus called to everybody: come closer
 Please help Zeeland in this crisis
 He helped Vlissingen in the greatest disaster,
 He showed his fatherly care
 Protects the maintenance of Zeeland,
 This is a guarantee for this Nation
 That it will obtain a better condition in the future.³⁷

At the same time, his poem is filled with critical references to the actual political situation. He underlines that the *eleventh* department of the Dutch kingdom is in severe danger, and his warnings go hand in hand with patriotic exclamations of the great Dutch nation, whose inhabitants are ‘the bravest people on earth’.³⁸

Even more outspoken in their criticism of the actual political situation were two other poets: the Zeelandic clergyman Cornelius van Epen and Willem Cornelis van Campen, who was a student of theology in Leiden. Van Epen, who was a preacher in Vlissingen, published a lengthy elegy on the terrible storm and flood, entitled *Klaagzang bij den vreselijken storm en waterloed*.³⁹ In addition to describing the horrors of the flood itself, he paid much attention to the series of disasters that had occurred the past years. According to him, Vlissingen had once been a very prosperous trading city, but everything had deteriorated rapidly since the arrival of the French: Vlissingen had basically been ‘robbed’ of everything. The implementation of the Continental System made it impossible to make a living: smuggling was the only way to survive. To make things worse, Vlissingen had been annexed by the French, the ‘deepest humiliation’ ever. And as if that were not sufficient hardship, the city had also been struck by a flood. Van Epen prayed to God for mercy and even begged his greatest enemy, Napoleon, to spare the inhabitants of Vlissingen from further catastrophes. He ended his poem in a somewhat more positive tone, by referring to the nation’s glorious past, in particular to the relief of Leiden in 1574. This flood had been deliberately caused and stood at the beginning of the liberation of the entire Dutch Republic. An image of this event was printed on the front page of Van Epen’s poem. In this way, the readers were invited to draw a parallel with the present situation and to see the flood of Vlissingen as a turning point in history as well. Van Epen also referred to two national heroes, who were born in Vlissingen: the seventeenth-century sea hero Michiel de Ruyter and the eighteenth-century poet Jacobus Bellamy. The reference to Bellamy was quite significant: he was known as one of the most passionate members of the Patriots, and his poems were filled with cries for liberty and freedom.

Van Epen’s poem must have been quite successful, given that a second edition was printed the same year and that his poem inspired another author: Willem Cornelis van Campen. On the 3rd of March 1808 the latter recited before a society in Leiden a poem on the flood of Vlissingen that bears much resemblance to Van Epen’s work. Firstly, he uses the same motto, namely a verse from Vergil’s *Aeneid* (book 2, 6–8): ‘Quis talis fando [...] Temperet a lacrimis’.⁴⁰ In these verses Aeneas asks who can refrain from tears in the face of such woes; even the worst enemies must be moved. The parallel with the present situation is again obvious: even the French rulers (Louis Bonaparte and Napoleon) cannot refrain from an emotional response. Secondly, Van Campen also mentions De Ruyter and

Bellamy as the two beacons of hope in these times of misery. Finally, he expresses his indignation over the annexation of Vlissingen by the French and begs for the maintenance of the Dutch people and the fatherland.⁴¹ During these years Van Campen wrote several other resistance poems, but it wasn't until after the liberation from the French that he dared to publish all of them.⁴² That was probably a wise decision, as the contents were very rebellious: in one of them he called his fellow countrymen to arms by referring to the brave resistance of the Spaniards against Napoleon in 1808.⁴³

Finally, the play *Ewoud van Lodijke of De ondergang der Zeeuwsche stad Romerswaal* (Ewoud van Lodijke or the fall of the Zeelandic city Romerswaal, 1808) by Adriaan Loosjes, is worth mentioning. Just as in the play he wrote in 1807 on the occasion of the disaster in Leiden, he chose a historical theme to express his sympathy with the victims. He drew a parallel with the flood in 1555 of Romerswaal, a small town in Zeeland. And just as in 1807, Loosjes deliberately did not refer to Louis Bonaparte, while nearly every single author did mention the French monarch. It was Loosjes' way of protesting against foreign rule. He hid some critical verses in the monologue of a recluse, who lamented: 'With tears in my eyes I witnessed the woe/When I saw my fatherland sink into the abyss'.⁴⁴

The flood of 1809 in Gelderland

Less than one year later, the Kingdom of Holland, was struck by another major flood. A storm on 7 and 8 December caused floods in the provinces of North Holland, Friesland, Gelderland and Overijssel. One month later, in January 1809, the entire territory of the 'Rivierengebied' (river area), including the Betuwe, became a wild sea of ice rocks.⁴⁵ This was one of the worst floods ever in the nation's history because of the high number of victims: in total 275 people lost their lives. The details of the disaster were extremely well documented by the administrator, H. Ewijk. His account, commissioned by the king and published in the winter of 1809, gave an exact report of what happened day by day. It also contained detailed lists of the sums that were donated by each department in response to the king's call for donations.⁴⁶ It was the second time in the nation's history that a charity was organized on a national scale. The national scope of the event also becomes clear from the subscription list: an impressive number of subscribers from the entire country supported the publication with Louis Bonaparte's name topping the list.

The report gave a very positive image of the king's activities. Special attention was paid to his visit in the end of January to Gorcum, where the situation was precarious. The French general Taraijre had ordered his men to fill the streets with stones, and they managed to avoid a total collapse of the city. When the king continued on his travels, his own life was threatened when he arrived at the dyke of Dalem. He found himself almost surrounded by the water, but he managed to escape. On his way back, he offered personal care and help in every village or little town he passed. According to Ewijk, there was but one conclusion to be drawn: the Dutch nation was extremely lucky to have a ruler who did everything in his power to help his people. He was a true 'father of his people'.⁴⁷ (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3 Louis Napoleon on the dyke at Dalem. Reinier Vinkeles / Cornelis van Hardenbergh, Amsterdam 1809. Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

It is obvious that Ewijk's account deliberately shaped a positive image of the king. This top-down-created image, however, was shared in most popular reactions: authors unanimously lauded the king's bravery and generosity. Some of them might have been careful in expressing any criticism, but in general, the gratitude and praise seem genuine. J. S. Swaan, dean of the Latin Schools and secretary of the department of Culemborg, wrote: 'If I must mention one name, who everybody praises/It is that of Lodewijk, the saviour of the helpless,/Supporter of the sorrowful people/father of his subjects'.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, several authors also seized the opportunity to criticize the French regime. An ambivalent poetical reaction, for example, was published by the Remonstrant clergyman Gerbrand Bruining, who expressed his unease with the series of annual disasters that had hit his fatherland since it had turned into a monarchy:

What is bothering me? What makes my bosom swell?

[...]

What makes my unchained tongue rise in a lamenting tone,

About the disasters which hit the land of the king and its people every spring

Since the republican reign came to an end

And the Fatherland was transformed into a Kingdom?⁴⁹

The author's answer is clear: the Dutch people should stop lamenting about their misery but instead be grateful to have been spared from worse disasters, such as warfare and total destruction. Devoutness should be maintained to avoid any further punishment by God, and gratitude should be paid to the protector of the Dutch nation: Louis Bonaparte. Nevertheless, by publishing these verses the author at least suggested that

a connection could be made between the recent natural and political disasters. He also included some verses about the recent siege of Zaragoza in Spain, where Napoleon had ruthlessly destroyed all his opponents. In the end, however, the poem contained more support than criticism of the present political situation.⁵⁰

More outspoken in his criticism was the above-mentioned Frans Adam de Hartogh, who called the flood in Gelderland the climax of disasters. In his eyes the Fatherland was completely collapsing, as the result of the combination of warfare and natural disaster. While the fields flooded with human blood, the resources of the Dutch were also exhausted. De Hartogh made reference to the earlier revolt against the Spaniards and hoped that God would once more show his mercy to the Dutch people by sending peace. Interestingly enough, he considered the disastrous flood of Gelderland as the binding force of the nation: 'See at once, millions of souls, united as one man'.⁵¹ He was heartened by the idea that the Dutch people would show their benevolence, one of their strong characteristics:

Even bigger shines compassion
When the Dutch salvation has sunk
This may be called courageous
In times of fear and hopeless sadness
What Nation is our equal?
Shine Holland in the sky blue clouds
Admired by all earthly people
Admired by the Heavenly Reign.⁵²

In De Hartogh's poem, national awareness took shape along two lines: first, the disastrous events made the people stand together as 'one man'. Second, catastrophe made them aware of one of their greatest, typically Dutch characteristics: compassion and caring for one another.

Conclusion

The three disasters that hit the Dutch Kingdom in the years 1807–9 had a huge impact on the Dutch kingdom and its inhabitants. They had a positive impact on the image of their new king, Louis Bonaparte, who showed his qualities as a leader and his concern for the Dutch people. He earned much respect from the Dutch people for his many benevolent activities, including supporting two national collections.

This positive image was not only propagated through state-sponsored writings, but can also be found in popular reactions to the events. Poets and pamphleteers expressed their gratitude to the king and praised his generous character. Nevertheless, authors also grabbed the opportunity to express their criticism of French rule. The annexation of Vlissingen especially led to fierce protests against the negative consequences in terms of trade, prosperity and conscription. Feelings of national pride were expressed by referring to the glorious past of the nation and local heroes such as De Ruyter and Bellamy. This political urgency was less visible in the reactions to the flood in Gelderland a year later,

although an author like De Hartogh made an emotional appeal for the maintenance of the fatherland in general.

One year later, in the spring of 1810, the political situation had changed dramatically. Napoleon was dissatisfied with his brother's rule of the Dutch kingdom and threatened his position. Complete annexation of the Dutch nation seemed unavoidable, and this prospect inspired the Amsterdam trader and poet Ambrosius Justus Zubli to compose an extensive poem to commemorate the floods of 1809. In his foreword, he reminded his readers of the benevolence of the king and expressed his fears about the terrifying and woeful uncertainty they were currently facing. Even though the king had been unable to maintain the existence of the Dutch nation, the remembrance of his bravery and that of the Dutch people might offer some comfort in these dreadful days.⁵³ Sixty-seven pages of patriotic poetry followed, in which themes such as liberation, freedom and national pride dominated. Zubli in particular praised the hard labour of the men in 1809, who pointed the present-day readers in the right direction:

Come on, Citizens! The heart that beats in you,
Is glowing for your City and the Nation: you have to achieve something great:
The gaping abyss must be avoided
Or would a Batavian ever surrender to a Roman?⁵⁴

The way the citizens had managed to cope with the flood in 1809 now served as an example of how to face the current political crisis. The warlike message could hardly be misunderstood: a real Batavian (the Dutch) would never be defeated by a Roman (the French).

Notes

¹ F.A. de Hartogh, *Bij den watervloed van 1809* (s.l. 1809), p. 8. All English translations are mine. Research for this article was funded by NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) and carried out with a Vidi grant for the project 'Proud to Be Dutch. The Role of War and Propaganda Literature in the Shaping of an Early Modern Dutch Identity, 1648–1815'.

² On De Hartogh's membership in this society, see Marleen de Vries, *Beschaven! Letterkundige genootschappen in Nederland 1750–1880* (Nijmegen: Vantilt), pp. 172, 389.

³ De Hartogh, *Bij den watervloed van 1809*, p. 8.

⁴ For a general overview of Napoleon's rule in Europe: Michael Broers, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799–1815* (New York: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1996). On Louis Bonaparte's reign, see Annie Jourdan (ed.), *Louis Bonaparte: roi de Hollande (1806–1810)* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2010).

⁵ Arti Ponsen and Ed van der Vlist (eds.), *Het fataal evenement. De buskruitramp van 1807 in Leiden* (Leiden: Uitgeverij Ginko, 2007).

⁶ Gerrit Jasper Schenk, 'Historical Disaster Research. State of Research, Concepts, Methods and Case Studies', *Historical Social Research*, 32.3 (2007), 9–31.

⁷ Carla Meyer, Katja Patzel-Mattern and Gerrit Jasper Schenk (eds.), *Krisengeschichte(n). 'Krise' als Leitbegriff und Erzählmuster in kulturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), p. 23.

⁸ Political dimensions are also discussed in Franz Mauelshagen, 'Disaster and Political Culture in Germany since 1500', in *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses*, ed. by Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 41–76 and Andrea Janku, Gerrit J. Schenk and Franz Mauelshagen, 'Introduction', in *Historical Disaster in Context. Science, Religion and Politics*, ed. by idem (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 8–12.

⁹ See for instance, José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) or Anneke Smelik's analysis of the mediated memories of 9/11: 'Mediating Memories. The Ethics of Post-9/11 Spectatorship', *Arcadia – International Journal for Literary Studies*, 45.2 (2011), 307–25.

¹⁰ Monica Juneja and Gerrit Jasper Schenk, 'Viewing Disasters. Myth, History, Iconography and Media across Europe and Asia', in *Disaster as Image. Iconographies and Media Strategies across Europe and*

- Asia*, ed. by Monica Juneja and Gerrit Jasper Schenk (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014), pp. 7–40, especially pp. 8–9.
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- ²⁹ Jan Buisman, *Extreem weer! Een canon van weergaloze winters & zinderende zomers, hagel & hozen, stormen & watersnoden* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2011), pp. 243–45. All the names of the victims in Vlissingen are listed in *Middelburgsche Courant* (21 January 1808).
- ³⁰ See the report of the provincial committee, published in *Middelburgsche Courant* (8 February 1808).
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- ³⁴ In reaction to the threat of war with England the city had already been seized by the French in 1803; protest was uttered in the anonymous pamphlet *De sleutels van Vlissingen, overgegeven aan Buonaparte, eersten consul der Fransche republiek, op den 12 July 1803*. I owe this information to Bart Verheijen, who will elaborate on the particular situation of Vlissingen during the period 1801–1813 in his dissertation.
- ³⁵ Anonymous, *Klagt eener Vlissingsche moeder. In Wintermaand, 1807* (s. a: s. l.). See on this pamphlet also Joor, *De Adelaar en het Lam*, pp. 321–22.
- ³⁶ Anonymous, *Klagt eener Vlissingsche moeder*, p. 4.
- ³⁷ Willem Justus Winckler, *Kort verhaal van Vlissingen en Zeelands ramp, in den jongstleden geduchtsten watervloed [...]* (Middelburg: C. Jongkindt Jr. 1808), p. 5.
- ³⁸ Winckler, *Kort verhaal van Vlissingen*, p. 6.
- ³⁹ Cornelius van Epen, *Klaagzang bij den vreselijken storm en watervloed, die de veelvuldige rampen van Vlissingen in den nacht, tusschen den 14 en 15 van louwmaand 1808 volmaakte* (Vlissingen: C. de Wolff Cz., 1808). In the *Middelburgsche Courant* (21 January 1808) reference is made to a 'passionate' sermon preached by Van Epen in de 'Oostkerk' in Vlissingen some days after the flood.

- ⁴⁰ The full passage reads: 'Quis talia fando Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulixi temperet a lacrimis' ('What cruel Myrmidon or Dolopian, or who of hardened Ulysses' band, can, in the very relation of such woes refrain from tears'). With thanks to Vincent Hunink.
- ⁴¹ W. C. van Campen, *Vlissingen op den 15. Januarij 1808* (Leiden: Herdingh en Du Mortier, 1808).
- ⁴² Van Campen is said to have written an anonymous poem in which he criticized the annexation in 1810 and that led to a police investigation. See Fr. K. H. Kossmann, 'Campen, Willem Cornelis van', in *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*. Vol. 6, ed. by C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok (Leiden A. W. Sijthoff, 1924), pp. 261–62.
- ⁴³ W. C. van Campen, *Mijne verontwaardiging onder den Franschen dwang. Drie dichtstukjes* (Alkmaar: I. A. van Harencarspel, 1814).
- ⁴⁴ Adriaan Loosjes, *Ewoud van Lodijke of De ondergang der Zeeuwsche stad Romerswaal* (Haarlem: A. Loosjes Pz., 1808), p. 73.
- ⁴⁵ See on this flood: Ton Burgers, *Nederlands grote rivieren. Drie eeuwen strijd tegen overstromingen* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Matrijs, 2014), pp. 89–102.
- ⁴⁶ H. Ewijk, *Geschiedenkundig verslag der dijkbreuken en overstromingen langs de rivieren in het koninkrijk Holland. Voorgevallen in louwmaand MDCCIX* (Amsterdam: Joh. Allart en Jac. Ruys, 1809).
- ⁴⁷ See Ewijk, *Geschiedkundig verslag*, Vol. 1, 12, pp. 156–59; Vol. 2, p. 279.
- ⁴⁸ J.S. Swaan, *Dichterlijke voorlezing betrekkelijk den jongsten watersnood [...]* (Culemborg: departement Culemborg, 1809), p. 14. Laudatory verses were also written by, amongst others, J. Immerzeel Jr., W. C. Lochmann van Königsfeldt geb. Meysenheim, E. J. Mecima, M. Klier, J. Schyvliet, N. van der Hulst, W. Smits, Huibertus Kuiperi, and Mr. T. van Limburg.
- ⁴⁹ Gerbrand Bruining, *Dichterlijke uitweiding over den tegenwoordigen watervloed* (s. l.: s. a., 1809), p. 3.
- ⁵⁰ On Gerbrand Bruining's attitude towards the French regime, see: Eveline Koolhaas-Grosfeld, *De ontdekking van de Nederland in boeken en prenten rond 1800* (Zuthpen: Walburg Pers, 2010), pp. 262–65; Kees Boschma, "Een Friesch om utens". De "vaderlandsliefde" van Gerbrand Bruining', *Letterkundig Magazijn*, 28 (2010), 38–42.
- ⁵¹ De Hartogh, *Bij den watervloed*, 5.
- ⁵² De Hartogh, *Bij den watervloed*, p. 7.
- ⁵³ Ambrosius Justus Zubli, *Dichttafereel van den winter, storm en overstromingen van den jare 1809, in drie zangen met koren* (Amsterdam: A. A. de Koning en B. Uylenbroek, 1810), pp. 8–9.
- ⁵⁴ Zubli, *Dichttafereel*, p. 50.

Funding

This work was supported by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek [grant number 276-30-008].

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